



Interview with Carolyn Minick Mason
Owner and Creative Director
Love Notes Event and Occasion Specialists

Q1. *Why did you leave a legal career to become an event coordinator?*

A1. Ten years ago, I graduated from law school and naturally decided to become a lawyer. I was interested in event planning then, but I made the decision to postpone my event planning career to pursue a career in law.

When I left my legal career last year, I actually felt as though it was fate, because I was making the decision to resume my first true love -- event coordination and design. By no means does this mean that I did not enjoy practicing law all those years because, for the most part, I did. It just didn't feed my soul or provide me REAL pleasure the way my current career does. After September 11, 2001, I began to realize just how fragile life really is. So, I felt that I needed to follow my dreams and live my passion while I had the chance. I've never been happier!

Q2. *What is the most challenging part of your industry?*

A2. I would have to say, staying abreast of rapidly changing technology. The internet has literally transformed the way brides plan their weddings. Since most brides (almost 70%) now do everything from finding their vendors to registering their gift preferences on the internet, I must make sure that I have a presence on the web as well. Therefore, not only must I have a website so that potential brides can find me, I must also keep the content on my website updated and fresh. Also, I have to keep up with the many options for marketing Love Notes on the internet and in the press. Lastly, I have to keep my finger on the pulse of hot and exciting new event and meeting planning technologies in areas such as audio-visual, photography and videography, lighting and music. This allows me to be creative enough to design events with important elements like staging, lighting and audio-visual for all clients, regardless of their budgets. And, I make sure that these technical elements are integrated to create a multi-layered, synergistic effect.

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Q3. *Your company is named Love Notes, but you handle more than weddings. How did you select the name?*

A3. I chose the name Love Notes because it reflects my passion for music, my love of exquisite fragrance and my appreciation for the art of the hand-written note. I loved the symbolism of creating events that mirror a well-orchestrated jazz band or the scent of a beautiful fragrance. Like the notes of music and of fragrance, true harmony is created when these notes (i.e., elements) are layered on one another to create a wholly distinct sound or scent. The same is true of love and marriage -- once two separate notes (melodies) come together, a harmonious blend is created. When I design my social events like weddings and parties, I try to layer various elements on top of each other to create the ultimate sensory experience of sight, sound, touch, taste and smell. Additionally, when I create civic, corporate or charitable events, we strive to layer the notes of a company or organization's mission, culture and values to unveil a distinct event that totally captures the entity's essence.

Q4. *Tell us about what distinguishes your services from other event coordinators and wedding planners.*

A4. In addition to having an extensive background in business and in law, I'm also an accomplished singer and musician. And, if I might say so myself, I'm a pretty darn good cook. Consequently, I bring to my clients a variety of unique skill sets. For example, I can not only help them select their wedding music, I can play it or sing it for them. Not only can I help them with menu planning ideas for their bridal shower or rehearsal dinner, I can help cater it. Not only can I review their vendor contracts for them, I can draft them and negotiate with vendors on my clients' behalf. Very few (if any) planners can say they can do all these things. In addition to this, I am a very hands-on, detailed person. As such, I'm intimately involved with all of the details of an event regardless of whether the vendors were selected by my client or by me.

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Q5. What unique things can people expect from your services?

A5. Clients can expect an emphasis on using artisans and designers who completely customize their products for each client. Many of them are true artisans who make their products solely by hand and/or who use only natural ingredients. Clients can also expect to receive almost unfettered access to me. I am available to my clients any time they need me.

Q6. What is the best part of your job?

A6. Without question, my clients are the reason why I continue to do this job. It's wonderful to meet couples that are embarking on such a momentous journey – marriage. I'm glad I can help make their transition from two individuals to one unit a meaningful, symbolic and fun occasion. Although it seems as though I often play the role of marriage counselor, therapist and best friend all at one time, it's rewarding to know that I help them keep their sanity during such a life-altering and stressful period.

Q7. You have an MBA and a Juris Doctor; how does your education and prior work experience translate to your current business?

A7. After receiving my MBA with a concentration in Labor and Human Resources Policy, I practiced law as a labor lawyer for several years. In this capacity, I was responsible for negotiating, drafting and administering over 100 labor contracts with major unions such as the Teamsters and the United Food and Commercial Workers. As an employment lawyer, I worked on numerous matters involving alleged violations of federal and state laws pertaining to sexual harassment, race, sex, age and disability discrimination and general employment-related matters. In addition, I provided training in these same areas to all levels of management at a Fortune 500 company. As a result of these experiences, I have developed extensive skills in negotiating contracts with vendors, performing research on current trends and practices within the special events industry and speaking to fellow colleagues within the special events industry on various topics. Most importantly, my education and work experience in human resources have helped me foster excellent communication skills with clients, vendors and colleagues alike.

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Q8. *You're married. Did you plan your own wedding, or did you hire a coordinator?*

A8. Basically, I planned my entire wedding myself in less than six months. Since I knew exactly what I wanted and knew most of the vendors that I wanted to work with, I thought it was easier for me to plan my wedding myself. I also had a very large bridal party who was extremely helpful in putting all of my plans in place. Nonetheless, I did use a coordinator who helped my bridal party and me coordinate all of the other wedding events and who also served as my wedding day coordinator.

Q9. *Why should an engaged couple hire a coordinator?*

A9. Hiring a coordinator is akin to taking out an insurance policy to safeguard your peace of mind. Engaged couples should thoroughly enjoy being engaged. Once the frenzy of planning a wedding begins, couples often find that they don't even have time to go out on dates with each other anymore. Instead, their days and nights are spent researching and meeting with vendors, shopping for bridal attire, looking for wedding locations and searching the internet for favor and theme ideas. Although most couples will still want to be involved in the wedding planning process to some degree, hiring a consultant can at least save you time and money by helping to find the best vendors for your particular needs. Since most of my brides lead very hectic professional and personal lives, they have come to realize that there is a direct correlation between time and money. And, hiring a good consultant will help you save both.

Q10. *Your business also handles other types of events. How is planning a corporate event different and/or similar to planning a wedding?*

A10. All events require the same attention to detail and extensive logistical planning. So, in my opinion, the biggest difference is in the client's needs. Most wedding clients want very artistic and unique details. They want their personal style, culture and ethnicity, family history and, of course, their love story to be reflected in every aspect of the wedding. In the same vein, a corporate client wants its company's culture, history and brand to be reflected in all aspects of the event. Moreover, the message or theme that it's trying to convey must be continually repeated throughout the event. I have found, however, that social clients are much more artistic and personal. The use of family crests, monograms and cultural symbols are used for weddings. Since corporations are comprised of many individuals of various backgrounds, races and personal histories, they tend to want details which help guests to identify the corporate or organization's brand.

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